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S P E E C H

OF

MR. ELLIOTT, OF SOUTH CAROLINA,

BEFORE THE

COMMERCIAL CONVENTION,

HELD AT KNOXVILLE, AUGUST 10th, 1857,

ON THE FORTIFYING OF

PORT ROYAL HARBOR, S. C.,

AND THE

ESTABLISHMENT OF A COALING STATION

FOR LARGE GOVERNMENT STEAMERS.

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COLUMBIA, S. C.:

STEAM POWER PRESS OF CAROLINA TIMES.

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1857.

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## SPEECH.

MR. PRESIDENT : During the session of the Legislature of South Carolina in December last, I had the honor of submitting similar resolutions to these that I now offer to this body. I trust that this convention will not think that I am trespassing too much upon its patience, when I assure them that the Legislature of South Carolina had given them her unanimous approval, and that any measure touching Southern development that she may have sustained by so marked an approval, could not be a matter of indifference to her sister States, now assembled in this convention.

Since it has been demonstrated that to carry on a successful foreign trade where the countries are at a distance from each other, large ships are absolutely essential, it has become a matter of great importance to the cotton region of the slaveholding South, that they should have harbors along their coast of sufficient depth to admit ships of the larger class. Hitherto it has been supposed that there existed no harbor along the Southern coast South of the Capes of the Chesapeake that would admit the largest class of ships. The progress of the coast survey has developed the fact that there are several. Beaufort in North Carolina has a depth of 17 feet at low water; Brunswick in Georgia has a similar depth; Port Royal in South Carolina has a depth of 20 feet. It is to the capacity and position of this latter port that I wish to call the attention of this convention. The first account of this harbor that we have any authentic information of, is that it was the port selected by the French Huguenots for their settlement in 1562, when they attempted a colony under Rebault. He designated it as the Grand Reiviere, and gave the most glowing description of its capacity and depth of water. This colony was abandoned, owing to the neglect of France to sustain it. Sale, in his attempt to colonise Carolina, under the English, was instructed to take possession of the same harbor, which they in their loyalty, from its superiority to all surrounding ports, gave it the name of Port Royal; a name it has ever since maintained. Sale made a settlement here; but his apprehension of the Spaniards at St. Augustine induced him to remove further north, to old Charlestown on the Ashley. During the revolution the heavy ships of England held possession of the harbor, and their frigates re-entered it again in the war of 1812; they the most maritime power on the face of the globe, were well acquainted with its capacity, while our own government were ignorant of it until a very recent period; in fact they seemed very much disposed to ignore it altogether until the recent survey by Lieut. Maffitt has demonstrated the truth of its great facilities.

Port Royal Bar is situated in South Carolina between Charleston and Savannah, on the 32d degree of North latitude, 3 m. 46 s., Longitude 80 d. 30 m. 27 s. It has three entrances, one with 17 feet 900 metres in width, one with 19 feet in depth and 1200 metres in width, and another with 20 feet in depth and equally wide.

The mean rise of the tide is 7 feet; at spring tide it rises 9 feet; and as these tides are greatly increased by N. E. and E. winds, it shows that 22 and 30 feet of water is frequently found upon the bar—a depth that equals or exceeds that of New York. “This harbor is easy to access in all winds except N. W.,” which being an off shore wind is not a dangerous one along our South Coast, and which is not liable to extreme cold as is the case in the higher latitudes in winter. After you have entered this harbor, the “up channel way is clear and deep with the best of holding ground.” “Broad River, which empties into Port Royal has a wide channel, with an average depth of five fathoms up to the N. E. branch, a distance of  $29\frac{1}{2}$  miles.” “Beaufort River, also a tributary of Port Royal, affords 18 feet at mean low water until within three miles of the town of Beaufort, from thence up not less than 14 feet can be found at low water. From the report which I have condensed, it will be perceived that this harbor is not only deep, but eminently capacious and safe when once entered. This harbor is a large arm of the sea penetrating among high, dry sea islands, and having no fresh water stream emptying into it of any magnitude, its waters are as briny as the ocean itself, and hence its great salubrity. We can show as hale and hearty a population as dwell upon the earth, there are at least a half dozen positions upon its banks where a city could be erected, that would have depth enough at its wharves to accomodate any vessel that could enter its bar. Its location upon an island would furnish no objection to commercial greatness. Tyre and Venice, of the old world, and New York on our own continent, are all insular cities, and a position like this, in a warm climate as our is, would add greatly to its health and coolness. Taking it for granted that I have demonstrated that this harbor is the best as to depth and capacity South of the Chesapeake, the next point to discuss is its position geographically in respect to Southern trade. It is between the cities of Savannah and Charleston, and this fact will serve to illustrate why this port has been hitherto neglected. These cities so long as small vessels were used for foreign commerce were amply sufficient to every want of our Atlantic Commerce. It would appear from its approximation to these two cities, that this Port Royal should hereafter be the foreign gate or outlet to their commerce. Now as to its position in respect to the Southern Cotton producing States, it is just above the 32d parallel. Run your eye westward from this point on the map and you will find that the degree will take you through the heart of the Cotton States of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Yet westward still it will pass through the Northern portion of Louisiana and Texas; passing still further in its westward course, it will pass through a portion of New Mexico—will enter that portion of territory South of the Rio Gila, acquired by the Gadsden Treaty, aye, even the same territory of Arizona which is even now asking for a seat of sisterhood among us, crossing the Rio Colorado above its junction with the Gulf of California, and passing onward strikes the Pacific Ocean in the neighborhood of San Diego. This is the shortest route from the North Pacific to the North Atlantic Ocean. If you take a higher latitude the continents widen its distance, if you pursue a lower latitude you will encounter the Peninsula and Gulf of California on the Pacific Coast, if you still pursue a more Southern route you will still encounter the Peninsula of Florida on the Gulf of Mexico. When we reflect that from the cities of Charleston



and Savannah there is a continuous Rail Road connexion with the Mississippi at Memphis and a progression on to Vicksburg, and that from these points they are progressing westward to Shreveport and Fulton, and that it is almost certain that these two lines will form a single trunk at Fort Belknap in Northern Texas and is to continue on to the Pacific at San Diego—it would seem that these cities, Charleston and Savannah, should be the outlet for the trade, and they not having the requisite of deep water, that Port Royal ought to be the location of the Eastern terminus. The topographical Engineers directed to survey the Western route to the Pacific, have declared that the 32d degree is the shortest, most feasible and most economical route. Capt. Humphrey, in a recent publication re-asserts the same conclusion that the 32d parallel will be 30 millions of dollars the cheapest, and 400 miles the shortest also. It will run through a climate that will admit of its use throughout the entire year. It requires but little enterprise and little capital from the slaveholding South to inaugurate this Commercial Market, at Port Royal. It is situated on the line of the great cotton States at the nearest point of deep water upon the Atlantic, and is of easy access to the great manufactories of cotton both in Europe and North America. Its location at this point will call into vigorous play all the railroad enterprise of the Southern country—is now of easy access by steamers from Savannah and Charleston. From the former, there is a safe, deep inland passage that can be made at all times of the tide, and could be accomplished as regularly as any other steamboat route that is now run over in the same distance of 60 miles. The Charleston and Savannah rail road will approach within a distance of 25 miles *any position* that is likely to be fixed upon as the site of a city. Such, then, is the situation of this magnificent harbor, in respect to its location, to the cotton regions of the South. Now how is it situated in respect to foreign commerce with Europe and to its position as Canada and the Northern Atlantic States?

The Gulf Stream runs immediately in front of its mouth. Vessels bound to Europe or the North, will take its favoring currents and proceed on their voyage, on their return voyage from the North. By keeping near the coast they avoid its contrary current. This is easily done, and is the habit of the coasting Captains—this they are able to do, as far South as Savannah; but in proceeding South in order to go around Cape of Florida, the danger and peril of the voyage increase in an eminent ratio. The narrow pathway, between the Bahamas and the coast of Florida, which is not occupied by the opposing current of the Gulf Stream in its propulsive course from the Gulf of Mexico, is occupied on either hand by dangerous shoals and wayward currents. Hence the wrecking business, is carried on as a matter of most profitable employment. The loss along this coast, in a single year has been estimated at a million of dollars. Now let us examine the position of Port Royal, as to the accomplishment of the voyage to Europe. Let us take Liverpool as the port most apt to be frequented for the disposal of the great Southern staple. Upon examining the chart laid down in Lieut. Maury's Physical Geography of the Sea, we will find that a ship leaving this Port Royal, would take advantage of the currents of the Gulf Stream, and reach her port in the usual course, pursued by vessels going to Liverpool from American ports. Upon returning, a new route may be taken with decided advantage, when a Southern Port is to be

reached, particularly when steamers are the motive power. Leaving Liverpool, a vessel might take advantage of the current that sets to the Southward, along the coast of France and Spain; she could touch at either the Azores, or Madeira—and passing along in the slack-water, upon the Northern verge of the Sargasso Sea, touch Bermuda, or, passing on either side of it, with the currents setting here, as it does, to the westward strike the Gulf Stream, which is narrow, at this point, and easily crossed, and enter the *Port Royal* in 32nd deg. of latitude. This route would be a favorite one for the Southern latitude, and would be free from the intense cold, and boisterous weather of the Northern passage in winter, and in summer, it is always favored by the trade winds. This is the route pursued by Columbus, and these are the same favoring breezes that drove him onward from the old world, so much to the terror of his companions.

This position at Port Royal bears a very important position to the Rice, Sugar, and Cotton region of the slave holding South. It also has a very important bearing upon the products of the great West that find outlet through the Mississippi into the Gulf of Mexico and thence into the Atlantic. Every cargo of gold from California across the Isthmus must of necessity in its transit to Europe, or the Northern States, pass by the portals of this very harbour. If there was a direct road from San Diego which has a deep harbour on the Pacific to this harbour of Port Royal the deepest on the Southern Atlantic, what a vast amount of distance and of dangerous navigation would be saved. China and Japan would be at our door. This harbour is the only one that will admit a line of battle ships or a large steamer from the Chesapeake to the Capes of Florida a distance extending over twelve (12) degrees of latitude along the Atlantic Coast. In time of war, it is the Key to the Gulf of Mexico. A hostile fleet stationed safely by within its ample harbour could effectually cut off all the commerce between the Northern and Southern portions of the Union and would annihilate our foreign commerce. An enemy in the position would be like an eagle on his eyre, he could swoop down upon his prey and then

“Regain his perch that far o’erlooks the main  
Feast with fierce eye and hold his watch again.”

Yet this harbour is ignored by the Federal Government. Not a buoy floats upon its waters; not a light-house stands upon its shores; not a cannon is there mounted to protect the fugitive, or repel the foe. In its capacity for defence it stands as it did three hundred years ago when the flag of Jean Rebault floated, in discovery, upon its splendid solitude. What a strange commentary is this upon *southern forecast*—strange that the only port that could be used for her *destruction* or her commercial deliverance from Northern dominion should have remained so long ignored by the government and her people—and it is only now when the Southern heart is dimmed and clouded by danger that the glimmering of light begins to shoot feebly upon our vision amid o’erspreading darkness. Let us no longer be idle—let us be up and doing. The resolutions express the initiative, let us pursue it to its end—let us animate each other in this onward progress. Who can estimate the importance to the South or the world of this enterprise.

When I behold the vast assemblage before me, composed not of politicians, not of the

waiters on Federal honors—but the citizens, the tax-payers congregated here from the remote regions of the South and South west, in whose bosoms beat the true pulse of the Southern heart, I do hope we shall be able to accomplish something. If anything that I have said should waken Southern enterprize to a great result, I should be most amply rewarded for my presence in this assembly. Why gentlemen of the South, we can accomplish anything if we are united, and direct our energies to its accomplishment. Behold this vast Southern empire of ours, extending from the Capes of the old Dominion, to the Rio Grande. Behold it teeming with wealth, strength and human happiness. It is the creature of our own energy—the result of our own enterprise, inhabited by two distinct races, the superior directing the physical capacity of the inferior. We furnish the great proportion of the food, the clothing and the luxuries of mankind, the elements of national wealth are in our own reeking soil. The development of commercial greatness is in our own hands. Mankind—civilized mankind cannot exist without our products. Let us be just to ourselves, pass these resolutions, demand that the common Government of the nation, shall defend your coast, demand that she shall inaugurate *the great port of the cotton region* by sending heavy steamers to coal upon its banks, and illustrate to commercial christendom that your deep waters are open to commercial enterprise.

We ask for nothing but strict justice, we would receive nothing more, give us defences and give us the opportunity of commercial development, that which our constitution guarantees to all.

If foreign nations see that our own government appreciates this southern harbour of Port Royal, by sending its great steamers within its safe and capacious waters, they too will imitate its example—and we will have no need of building steamers of our own. We have only to place our wealth—the products of our soil, our rice, our wheat, our corn, our sugar, our bacon and cotton upon its banks beside its deep waters, and the carrying trade of the commercial world is at our service. Who knows what may be the result of our action in this matter? Steam-power has revolutionized human progress, under its mighty impulse. We see Cities and States and Empires springing into existence as if touched by the wand of the enchanter! Who knows but this little spot of earth, this harbour of Port Royal, beautified by the hand of God, having its location beside the mighty deep, hitherto spurned by the Federal Government—neglected by its parent state—overlooked and despised by its sister ports of the South—who knows—but what she may not hereafter come forth from her obscurity like the fabled mistress of the glittering slipper, arrayed in Royal apparel and wearing on her brow the *Imperial Commercial diadem* of this vast slave holding empire of ours.





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